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AUTHOR	Zimmer, Kathy
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ABSTRACT

Since 1971 the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center (New York) has been serving migrant farmworkers through an in-camp learning program. Teams of instructors provide survival-based instruction in English as a second language (ESL) and adult basic education to interested migrant adults and out-of-school youth. The instruction is provided in the migrant camps and homes, two evenings per week. The journal author has been travelling to these camps as an instructor since 1993. This publication includes excepts from her journal kept during the 1994 and 1995 seasons and describes her work at Seneca Castle and the Blue Eagle Camp. She used time after the evening meal, usually after the workers had been harvesting crops all day, to help them develop whatever skills they required individually, from basic math and making correct change to filling out forms in English or attempting to get a driver's license. She spoke very little Spanish so she taught using games like Bingo and UNO, or learning exercises involving naming objects. She took pleasure in small but important gains in her students' skills, such as writing their own names. One is left with the impression that the program was very rewarding not only for the students but the teacher as well. (TSP)

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TEACHING
IN A MIGRANT CAMP:

1994 - 1995 Journal Notes

Kathy Zimmer

BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center
Holcomb Building
Geneseo NY 14454

1996

Preface

Since 1971 the BOCES Geneseo-Migrant Center has been privileged to serve migrant farmworkers through an In-Camp Learning Program. Teams of instructors provide survival based instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) and adult basic education (ABE) to interested migrant adults and out-of-school youth. The instruction is provided in the migrant camps and homes, two evenings per week.

It takes a 'special person' to have the skills, flexibility, creativity and commitment to continue to offer quality instruction. The instructors not only address the educational needs of the migrant students but are called upon to assist with a myriad of other concerns: dental and health referrals, immigration questions/problems, clothing and food needs, prescription deliveries, transportation, etc.

Kathy Zimmer is one of these 'special people.' Beginning in August of 1993 Kathy has been traveling night after night into the migrant labor camps to offer exciting educational experiences. She has spent hundreds of hours with migrant workers, either on a one-on-one basis or in small groups, striving to increase their English and/or literacy levels. Upon

arrival in the area the migrant workers inquire when their teacher - Kathy - will be coming to the camp. She is not only a quality isntructor, she is a friend and advocate for her students.

This publication includes excerpts from a journal kept by Kathy during the 1994 and 1995 seasons. The entries are personal and provide the reader with, at least a brief entrée into migrant life. The reader will also experience vicariously the day to day triumphs and frustrations of an in-camp instructor.

Kathy is one of scores of instructors who have given of their time and creativity to assist farmworkers in developing better English, increasing reading abilities, writing a letter home, sending a money order, obtaining a driver's license and a host of survival needs. Thank you, Kathy, for sharing your journal and thank you, Kathy, and all other instructors who have worked with the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center. ¡Muchas Gracias!

Robert Lynch, Director
BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center

1994 Journal notes - Kathy Zimmer

September 26 - Seneca Castle

Good lesson— we "bought" groceries and the guys remembered to ask for the correct change when I short-changed them.

Miguel worked hard.... I think he and Juan really like one-to-one attention.

Miguel and Francisco pored over the picture dictionary together.

Debbie got pennies out to teach subtraction to Roberto.

October 4 - Seneca Castle

Roberto and Juan finally called me by name.

Debbie got pennies out to teach subtraction to Roberto.

October 4 - Seneca Castle

Roberto and Juan finally called me by name. Miguel tried to converse in English with me: he kept saying "splique in Inglish." He's leaving soon, to go to Chicago to work in a restaurant with his cousins.

Avelino asked me about "sun", "son" and "sound" (as in music on the radio); they all sound the same to him. It's the first time in a long while that Avelino has asked for any help with English.

October 19 - Seneca Castle

I helped Juan make tortillas. When they were done, he offered me some, and soup. I ate with him and one or two of the others.

Emiliano wants to learn the names of the tools tonight. He's new and speaks very little English. What's interesting about him is that he, unlike the others, tells me what he wants to learn, and that's neat. He really concentrates and repeats what he learns as if he's determined to fix it in his mind.

Jacinto continues to work hard. I've been giving him

work that's a little more challenging. He makes great use of the Spanish-English dictionary. I recently learned that he has a wife, Olga, and three sons in Guatemala, to whom he sends money. He showed me a picture of his wife.

October 24 - Seneca Castle

I got three of the new folks interested in English lessons: Rodolfo, Martin and Alvaro. We practiced a simple dialogue: "Hi, how are you?" "Fine, thank you.", etc... They are very nice men with a neat sense of humor.

To wind up the evening the four of us and Benito played UNO. Benito made it a point to name the colors and numbers in English. I was so pleased. Juan didn't want to play, but he helped and taught the new guys. It was fun.

September 14 - Seneca Castle

Miguel wrote his name correctly, without hesitating. (Juan did too, only he left out two letters.)

Jacinto is a real student... had me pronounce words from his big dictionary. I feel frustrated because he really tries to communicate and I don't know Spanish.

One of my faithful students was drunk tonight - the only time I've ever seen him like that: smiley and incomprehensible.

When you say "Hi, Tomás", he says "Good."

Roberto doesn't know how to add, I just discovered, but he's very bright. He had only one year of school. He said his father didn't have the money for more.

September 19 - Seneca Castle

I snagged Benito and Elibar for a half-hour lesson (topic: the days of the week) because they were the only ones there when I got there. They didn't want a lesson, but smilingly complied with my urging, and did get interested!

Jacinto really wants a map of Mexico. The one I brought out to camp had him so fascinated he pored over it for an hour.

They (especially Juan) like to tease me with the plastic snake they have displayed in their kitchen.

They tried to get Fred, my teaching partner this season, to eat hot peppers.

September 21 - Seneca Castle

Miguel hasn't shown a lot of interest in lessons, but tonight he smiled and said, "Sunday, Monday..." That's about as far as he could get, but we worked on Tuesday, Wednesday, etc... He also wanted to learn other words: dog, kitty, snake, turtle, and the fruits and vegetables.

Roberto did the addition problems I made up for him with very little difficulty. He wants more math the next time I come.

Marcelino and Tomás are leaving for Florida tomorrow. I don't like to see them go, especially Tomás.

The season will be over soon, and then everyone will be gone.

1995 Journal Notes - Kathy Zimmer

June 27 - Seneca Castle

Ladislao, Jonathan and I chased the pigs back into the barn for the lady next door.

July 10 - Seneca Castle

Antelmo stayed for the lesson! He spoke at least one English work, "gloves."

Our students asked for a one hour lesson instead of two because they had just had the mandated presentation on pesticide safety and hadn't eaten yet. Fortunately, we had brought some fruit juice from the Center pantry, so we poured that all around as we began the lesson.

Miguel is really working at the lessons this year...I hope he sticks with us.

July 24 - Seneca Castle

We had a terrific evening! Two and a half hours of games, dialogue practice, and a worksheet. One game we

played was Go Fish. Ramillo said," One more time, I like this play."

We were outside most of the evening. When the mosquitos got bad we went into the kitchen. We ended the evening by bringing out a couple of US map puzzles. Even though it was late, our students worked on those puzzles with enthusiasm (especially Moises).

July 26 - Seneca Castle

I casually asked Juan to write his name, (really, copy it, since I had already written it down.) He said, "I think so," and proceeded to copy it painstakingly, six times. Moises, Maximo and Francisco are incredible students: They try so hard, repeating over and over again what they have learned (tonight it was the parts of the body). I don't believe that Francisco has had any schooling at all and he learns very quickly. Moises is picking up stuff like lightning. Maximo took it upon himself to write the names of the parts of the body phonetically to help himself learn them.

July 31 - Seneca Castle

We've been having most of our lessons outside at the picnic table (we move inside when it's dark and the mosquitos are attacking). It's cool and pleasant outside. Tonight we were treated to some delicious corn on the cob.

I brought some photographs we had taken last week. Miguel and the others wanted a picture (fortunately I'd gotten double prints). I said "OK, (you can have the pictures) AFTER English lessons." When Miguel finally got his picture he just kept looking at it; he seemed to love having it. Bob and HIS boss stopped by and our students really tried to make us look like good teachers since they realized that these visitors were OUR bosses.

Jonathan and I modeled a dialogue between two farmworkers and our students loved it! And each took a turn playing a part - it was really neat.

August 14 - Seneca Castle

A miserably hot, muggy day. The men weeded cauliflower during the day. Miguel and Moises worked on the alphabet. Moises knows it all, Miguel can say about five letters. He has an expression on his face that says he's carrying the weight of the world; but he does say that his nosebleeds have stopped. Domingo actually stayed around for some English tonight and, for the first time, accepted some apple juice.

We invited everyone to the movies and lunch at Perkins in Canandaigua on August 27.

August 16 - Blue Eagle Camp

My second visit to Blue Eagle Camp - what a world! When we arrived, several folks were sitting around outside. William was loaded... kept smiling and slurring that he wanted to get his driver's license. I knew that he couldn't possibly stick around for class and he soon wandered off. (Now as I think about it, it makes me sad: at the last lesson he worked very hard to write his name. I hope I can work with him in the future, if only to have him practice writing his name).

We went into the kitchen and I proceeded to get ready to do some testing. Jean was a new fellow and he completed the whole test. He told us he had been a teacher in Haiti. He was a voracious student: I kept pulling out worksheets which he'd do, want corrected and then want more. (On one sheet he listed foods: chicken, hamburger, rice,and GOAT).

Albert was another newcomer. He said frankly that he didn't know his letters or anything. After he had been working on the alphabet for a while, I said to him: "Do you know how to write your name?" He said no. I said "Would you like to learn how to?" He said yes. For the rest of the evening he worked laboriously on copying his first and last name. It was a truly wonderful gift to see the delighted look on his face as he learned to write his own name.

Michel was back for the second time. He, too, seems to be almost completely uneducated, though he can write his name. He works hard and seems to like to manipulate

things. I'll have to capitalize on that. Maybe I can find some appropriate puzzles at garage sales. He always follows us outside and waves good-bye when we leave.

August 23 - Blue Eagle Camp

Michel and William worked for about two hours. I'm trying to teach Michel to be able to read and fill out forms...so far, we've worked on name, first and last, and soc. sec. number. William was tested and reached level four. Thus, his speaking and comprehension are comparatively strong. He is very weak on reading and writing — only went to kindergarten. We practiced writing his name tonight. Toward the end of the evening, for relaxation, I brought out my magnetic puzzle of the United States. The two fellows seemed to enjoy putting it together. Diane came over and, sweetly and gently, helped them do the puzzle.

Victor and Jean came in from work toward the end of the evening. Jean gave us some corn and tomatoes. I offered him a composition book to work on. He took it and seemed quite interested. Victor showed us part of a video of himself doing the limbo and eating fire(!) He did this type of entertainment on a cruise ship. He told me he was born in the Dominican Republic, grew up in Haiti, has been to Nassau, the Congo and I forget where else.

Other folks, meanwhile, came into the kitchen to cook their supper (it was around nine o'clock) ... a live fish was flopping in the sink; no doubt headed for a dinner plate. I like these people.

August 29 - Blue Eagle Camp

Michel worked again for about two hours. He's my most consistent student.

Elicois spent most of the two hours I was there practicing his name... writing, then spelling it aloud. A goal for me - getting him to the point at which he can do both with ease, like I can. Albert is a "character". He got angry with one of the African-American girls in camp because she was being a smart-ass and giving him the finger. I don't blame him. I have a pretty strong feeling that the Haitians are taken advantage of, or treated as if they are lower on the social ladder here, and also given fewer work hours. But, God bless him, Albert snapped out of his anger, became good-natured again, and worked again, very hard, with me, the "white gal" who was trying to help him.

Victor worked a long time tonight on the days of the week. He is ever gallant, and always ready to carry our stuff back to Doris' van when it's time to go. (Since I usually have a heavy load, I'm very grateful).

August 30 - Seneca Castle

Tonight my plan was to use the Polaroid to illustrate with pictures the dialogue we had practiced several weeks ago. It's a conversation between an experienced worker and a newly-arrived worker. I felt pressured because I wanted to do it outside and the sun was setting fast. By the time the guys got on the shirts they wanted to wear and were

ready, an unfamiliar car arrived on the scene. The driver was a shady-looking older guy I had never seen before. I was desperate and so said to myself: "I don't care if this guy is a drug dealer or not, I'm going to get pictures of the dialogue." Before I knew it, Mr. Shady-Looking was out of his car coaching the guys on how to pose for the pictures! I still don't know what he was there for and wouldn't trust him for a minute, but he did help with my project. Fortunately, he left after a few minutes. If he hadn't, I would have: I did not feel comfortable with him there.

September 11 - Seneca Castle

As I arrived at the camp I saw the most beautiful sunset. The guys were eating , so I waited outside by the picnic table. Avelino, the crew boss, came out and we chatted a bit. He asked where Jonathan, my teaching partner, was. I told him back to school in Ohio. He told me last year he stayed up here til January and returned in April.

The guys were tired tonight. They had worked harvesting pumpkins, cabbage and cauliflower.

I tape-recorded an interview with Benito and one with Domingo. I hope Moises comes to class on Wednesday because I'd really like to interview him on tape. He picks up English pronunciation quickly and accurately. Benito and Juan seemed to enjoy listening to the playback, Juan practiced writing his name some more. It was good to see him again. I hadn't seen him in a long time. He still teases me by trying to startle me: every so often he makes a

loud noise to see if I'll jump, then he laughs. I don't know if this is Guatemalan humor or Juan's own brand.

September 13 - Seneca Castle

A delightful evening! I brought the tape recorder again. (We did start off on shaky ground because, while Miguel seemed quite excited and allowed himself to be recorded right away, when we went to play it back, nothing happened. I felt bad. Miguel lost interest and disappeared. Max finally discovered that the mike had been plugged in incorrectly.) Then we recorded Max, Moises, and Samuel in dialogues of the questions and answers we had practiced. They enjoyed it. But, since their English is so limited, we soon ran out of conversation to record. Then- serendipity... I had an idea. I didn't know if it would work or cause me to make a fool of myself. In my desperation to use the recorder more, I turned to singing. None of my students wanted to be recorded singing a Spanish song, so ... I taught them "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". They loved it! (Much to my relief and pleasure). So we practiced and recorded this little American ditty for the rest of the evening. We brought out the apple juice and our hilarity and enjoyment attracted Benito, Domingo, Israel and Francisco, and Miguel came back, too. We got him on tape, introducing our song. It was fun and relaxing. In this kind of setting my students are sometimes inclined to risk a little English conversation: I was pleased when Samuel, for example, asked me how many years I had been coming out to camp, and where I lived.

September 14 - Blue Eagle

I was pleased: Albert came to me with the fifty cents he owed me for the notebook I bought him. I hope this transaction gave him dignity and made him feel good. He showed me that he had practiced writing his name in the notebook.

Working with students in a migrant camp sometimes causes me to say the Serenity Prayer, " God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

The flowers I brought last time were still in the jar on the table and still looked pretty.

September 20 - Seneca Castle

Did a lot of work with Moises and Benito tonight, with the others coming and going. Maximo hung in there for a while but he was obviously VERY tired. I heard some Spanish music (and some attempts to play a trumpet!), so I think some folks were enjoying themselves in their rooms. It didn't surprise me that Moises stayed for lessons the whole time. He's a bright, loyal, eager student. I WAS pleased that Benito stuck with it. He's bright, but not always in the mood for English lessons.

We worked on buying stuff and getting the right change, on asking for a receipt and on being aware of the sales tax.

We ended the evening with several games of UNO. Emigdio didn't want to play, but seemed to enjoy watching and , occasionally, calling out the numbers and colors in English.

I brought some blankets out from the Center. I told the men that it was going to get cold this weekend and that they could have a blanket ("cobija"") for a dollar "donacion" to the migrant center. They all took me up on the offer. No one had difficulty coming up with a buck. I think that it is more respectful to have them pay a small amount than to give them "hand-outs". I tried to make it very clear that the money wasn't for me personally. The dignity and pride of the men are very important to me.

September 28 - Blue Eagle

Brought my own camera tonight and had some fun taking snapshots. William, Leonard and Victor graciously, and with pleasure, I think, posed. Diane kept covering her face. The little girls were like the men, they posed easily. They loved it when the flash went off.

The medical team came tonight. They took blood

pressures and talked to folks with medical problems. Doris had the team visit with the young mother who was beaten up by her boyfriend. Her mouth is still swollen; she looks better than she did on Tuesday. That night she was holding ice to it , and her eye was swollen half-shut. It's hard to figure: her mother doesn't seem horrified or furious about what happened to her daughter. I don't know how D. herself feels.

Leonard worked so hard tonight. When we finished I put masking tape on the backs of his two worksheets so he could hang them in his room if he liked. He took them right away to do so, so I guess he was pleased. I often feel as if I have to tread carefully: I do not want to treat my students like children, and yet I want them to experience pride in their accomplishments. Earlier I had asked Leonard if he wanted to color the pictures of fruits and vegetables and he said "I want to work", so that's when we began to tackle the names of the months instead.

Later, he showed off his knowledge of the days of the week to Victor, who graciously paid attention and acknowledged his accomplishment.

October 11 - Seneca Castle

When I arrived at 7:30 the gang was cooking their supper. Samuel looked incredibly tired. He admitted to being tired; I think he'd had an eleven -hour day cutting cauliflower.

I felt a little awkward sitting at their kitchen table with my "stuff" while they sat and ate or cooked at the stove.

Emiliano and Emigdio graciously agreed to post-tests. (I've learned that if I say "my boss" wants me to test them they find it hard to refuse. I guess they identify with me having to do something for a boss.)

I was eventually able to get Emigdio and Benito to play "Concentration" with the alphabet cards. There was laughter and enjoyment. After that, those two wanted to eat (it was about 9:00). As I was gathering my things together, Benito said, " Kathy, do you want a potato?" He handed me a boiled potato, skin on, in a napkin. It tasted delicious (and gave me an excuse to hang around a little longer). I enjoyed "breaking bread" with my students.

October 16 - Seneca Castle

A good night. I brought my bag of wallet, belt, hat, etc.. and we played the memory game. The neat thing was that Domingo hung around and played. He asked if I were coming Wednesday (" miercoles") and told me he was leaving next Sunday..."maybe for Guatemala, maybe for Florida".

I later brought out my US map puzzles. My students DO love those puzzles! Israel worked on one for the first time; the others had done them before. To watch them fiddle with the pieces is like watching children. It's very obvious that they didn't get to do puzzles as children. Emiliano is a really nice man. He works hard for as long

as he wants to and indicates he's had enough by very simply saying, "Thank you."

I'm very fond of my students. They work hard and play hard (some came late to my "kitchen class" because they had been playing basketball). They have a delightful sense of humor. They don't seem to have the American spirit of competition when we play learning games. They're always helping each other.

October 23 - Seneca Castle

My students hadn't eaten yet when I arrived (7:30). When that happens at this time of year when it's cold and dark and I can't wait outside, I settle myself at the far end of the kitchen table so I'm out of the way, and wait. I try to engage in a little conversation, but not too much, out of respect for their "dinner hour".

Tonight I brought the Polaroid and some articles from a recent vocabulary lesson. The idea was to use the vocabulary, for example, - What is it?— It's a hat.—Please put it on. (And then take the student's picture.) There was some vocabulary review, but more just plain picture-taking. To my half-chagrin, half-pleasure, they wanted me in the pictures, too.

Later we played BINGO. Lately, my students have really enjoyed this game. I think it's a legitimate teaching tool for two reasons: 1) they hear and speak the names of the numbers and repeatedly hear the pronunciation of the English "I" which is different from the Spanish pronunciation. 2) The season is almost over, my students are working very hard cutting cauliflower, and it's difficult at this point to get them to apply themselves to anything very formal in the way of lessons.

Moises showed me stitches — he had cut himself while harvesting the cauliflower.

October 25 - Seneca Castle

A good night! First we listened to Benito on the tape-recorder "speaking English". Then we recorded Emiliano, Samuel and Emigdio "speaking English". Mostly, my students want to give one word answers to questions, like "yes", "no", and "cabbage". I tried to get a few sentences out of them: "I'm from Guatemala." "I'm married." "Today is Wednesday." Samuel did quite well. He knew the days of the week and the months in English. Then we listened to the tape I borrowed of children's songs in English and Spanish. Everybody enjoys "musica".

I guess we're on a BINGO kick: we finished the evening with about five games of it.

It was a light-hearted, pleasant evening. They asked if I was coming next Monday. I always feel good when they want to know if I'm coming the next time.

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November 1 - Seneca Castle

My last night (I wore my "I love Guatemala" tee-shirt). Juan was there! (I'd like to think he was there because he knew it was my last night, but you never know). He consented to a post-test ("for my boss"). And he worked on my ABC puzzle (I just took a chance and shoved it in front of him). Then he helped Emiliano with the US map puzzle. I brought the tape of children's songs and we listened to that.

I also brought some canned fruit from the Center's pantry, for BINGO prizes. (I usually don't have prizes for games because they seem to enjoy the games for their own sakes, but, since it was my last night, I thought I would). Samuel, Emigdio and Emiliano played BINGO for cans of peaches and pears. Then we talked about the English/ Spanish names for the seasons.

I said "Buenos noches, mis amigos. Vaya con Dios. (showing off my meager Spanish). Emiliano carried my box of stuff to the car. The end of another season.

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